



Department of Justice

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Tampa
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**FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF TAMPA CHARITY
SENTENCED TO 2 YEARS FOR EMBEZZLING FUNDS**

Tampa, Florida - U.S. District Judge Elizabeth A. Kovachevich, today sentenced Debbie J. Nieto, a 44-year old former Tampa resident, to two years' imprisonment, with five years of supervised release to follow, and ordered her to pay restitution in the amount of \$317,688.00, for embezzling funds from a local charity.

Nieto pleaded guilty to eleven counts of bank fraud on January 5, 2007, pursuant to a written plea agreement.

According to court documents, Nieto was employed from November 1998 through January 2004 as the Executive Director of Tampa Bay Reads ("TBR"), a local charity that funded literacy and educational programs in the Tampa Bay area. Beginning in mid-1999, Nieto used a variety of means to divert charitable funds to her own personal use. She wrote unauthorized salary and bonus checks to herself on TBR accounts at Amsouth Bank; wrote TBR checks to cash; and used the charity's checking accounts and ATM card to pay for a variety of personal expenses, including rent, car insurance, lingerie, jewelry, household furnishings, and groceries. Nieto also submitted a fraudulent "Certificate of Sole Proprietorship" to Salomon Smith Barney, attesting that she was the sole owner of TBR, in order to facilitate the transfer of funds from the charity's account there into her

personal investment account. The theft of funds from the charity continued until January 2004, when Nieto resigned from her position after the Board of Directors pushed for an audit of the charity's finances. As a result of Nieto's pervasive fraud, TBR was forced to close down its operation in 2004.

The case was investigated by U.S. Secret Service. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Cherie L. Krigsman of the Tampa Division.